is now proposed to achieve a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) by the year 2001. The Bangkok Agreement to which India is a signatory, seeks to promote economic development through a continuous process of trade expansion among the developing member countries of ESCAP. BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Srilanka, Thailand-Economic Cooperation) is a new initiative launched in June 1997 which aims at close economic cooperation between these countries by mutual trade concessions and joint projects in this region.

FOREX Reserve

2865. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the position of foreign exchange (FOREX) reserve at present is statisfactory;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps being taken by the Government for increasing the FOREX reserve?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a to (c) India's foreign exchange reserves including gold and SDRs, amounted to US $ 29.69 billion on July 25, 1997. The level of foreign exchange reserves, which is equivalent to over 8 months of imports, is considered satisfactory. The on-going wide ranging programme of macro-economic and structural reforms is expected to produce results that will sustian the foreign exchange reserves at a comfortable level.

Non-Payment of Loans to SCs

2866. DR. BALIRAM: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether complaints have been received from Scheduled Castes people against Simbhaoli Branch of State Bank of India, District Ghaziabad (U.P.) regarding non-payment of loan granted by Government under various welfare schemes for these people;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the loanees have received notices from the concerned departments for repayment of the loan which was actually not paid to them by the bank;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(e) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) to (e) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House to the extent available.

Transport Subsidy

2867. SHRI KESHAB MAHANTA:

SHRI SOMJIBHAI DAMOR:

Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the details of Transport subsidy claimed and released to North-Eastern States during each of the last three years, as on June 30, 1997, State-wise, Industry-wise;

(b) the reasons for delay in releasing the subsidy; and

(c) the steps being taken by the Government to remedy the situation?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Under the Transport Subsidy Scheme, the subsidy claims are first scrutinised by the State Level Committee and disbursement made to eligible units by the State Governments. Reimbursement thereof is claimed subsequently by the State Governments from the Central Government. The details of transport subsidy released to the State in the North-Eastern region during the last three years and during 1997-98 (upto 30th June, 1997) are given in the attached statement. The industries covered are plywood industry, flour milling, steel fabrication, oil and rice milling etc.

(b) and (c) Subsidy in respect of claims which are found to be in order is released to the State Governments immediately. However, wherever certain deficiencies are noticed, State Governments are requested to rectify the same and the subsidy in such cases is released soon after receipt of requisite details/clarifications.

Statement

Statement showing year-wise releases made by the Central Government under the Transport Subsidy Scheme.

(Rupees in lakhs)

Name of the State	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98 upto 30.06.1997
1	2	3	4	5
Assam	2217.90	3861.10	2061.89	1667.50
Manipur	128.70	—	—	—

1	2	3	4	5
Tripura	132.99	2.60	28.50	—
Arunachal Pradesh	47.66	—	267.42	—
Meghalaya	250.10	195.88	190.66	—
Nagaland	67.80	—	—	198.70
Mizoram	272.32	405.30	—	—
Total	3117.47	4464.88	2548.47	1866.20

[Translation]

U.P. Handicraft and Handloom Development Corporation

2868. SHRI D.P. YADAV: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Uttar Pradesh Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation is running in loss due to non-availability of financial assistance from the Government;

(b) if so, the funds provided/likely to be provided by the Government during 1997-98; and

(c) the achievements made by the Corporation during each of the last two years?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI R.L. JALAPPA): (a) There is no corporation in the name of Uttar Pradesh Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corportion.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Export of Textile, Tea and Sugar

2869. SHRI HARIVANSH SAHAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the names of the countries to which textile, tea, sugar exported and the foreign exchange earned by the Government from this export;

(b) whether Government of India has to import certain goods in lieu of export of these items; and

(c) if so, the years for which agreement for export and import of these items has been made, country-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (DR. BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH): (a) A Statement is enclosed.

(b) and (c) No, Sir.

Statement

Export of Textile, Tea, and Sugar

Commodity Name	*Value of exports during 1996-97 (US $ Million)	Major Importers
Tea	278.74	Russia, CIS Countries, U.K., Germany, Poland, UAE, Iran, Egypt, Japan, Saudi Arabia, etc.
Sugar & Mollasses	295.75	Pakistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Russia, EU & USA, etc.
Textile	7990.43	E.U., USA, Bangladesh, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, UAE, Canada, Switzerland, etc.

*Source: DGCI&S data.

[English]

Minimum Alternate Tax

2870. SHRI PRATAP SINGH SAINI: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a holding company/investment company be liable to pay Minimum Alternate Tax on dividends received by it from its subsidiaries on which dividends the subsidiary companies have already paid tax as per the recent amendment to the Income Tax Act; and

(b) whether the Government propose to introduce suitable legislation to ensure that holding companies do not pay tax twice on dividend once in the hands of the declaring company and the other as Minimum Alternate Tax in the